TL 5652-3

URGENT ACTION

On February 7, nine East Timorese youths entered the Australian Embassy in Jakarta requesting asylum. They clearly stated that they wanted asylum in Australia and did not want to be sent to Portugal. Their request was peremptorily refused, apparently by the embassy staff and without any proper review process. An embassy spokesperson stated that "it's very clear there is no basic reason to fulfill their request." The youths refused to leave the embassy.

On February 18, in desperation, three of the youths attempted suicide with pocket knives. They were sent to hospital, with two of the others accompanying them, on the understanding that they were under Australian protection. However, they were not provided with any such protection, and all five were in fact abducted from hospital and interrogated for nine hours. They are now in a house in Jakarta, expecting possible re-arrest at any time.

Four youths still remain in the embassy. One of them is a pregnant woman.

Please write or telephone the Australian High Commission as a matter of urgency. Ask that all nine be brought to Australia where they may submit formal petitions for asylum, and receive medical treatment and/or trauma counselling as needed. Point out that under international law, all requests for asylum must be seriously considered, not casually disregarded. Also insist that all nine *must* be kept under Australian protection (the location of the five in Jakarta is known to solidarity groups and could be made known to the Australian Embassy).

Australia has refused other applications for asylum from East Timorese on the basis that they are eligible to apply for Portuguese citizenship. *This is a violation of international law.* Eligibility to apply is not equivalent to citizenship itself, and does not disqualify Timorese from receiving asylum in another country if they demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution.

Australian High Commission, The Strand, London WC2B 4LA, tel 0171-379-4334